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East Face Vegetation Management Project Environmental Analysis Ready for Public Comments

BAKER CITY, Ore. – Due to the collaborative relationship between the Forest Service (USFS), Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), and Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), the East Face project provides a tremendous opportunity to apply compatible vegetation and fuels management treatments on federal, adjacent private lands and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife lands. The East Face Vegetation Management project area, in combination with adjacent BLM, State, and private lands, became a pilot project for the National Cohesive Wildfire Strategy (CWS) offering opportunities to apply the “all hands, all lands” principles and implement efforts to move the area towards the goals of the CWS. The East Face Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment (EA) documents the analysis of activities proposed on over 47,000 acres of USFS and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands.

Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya points out that “collaborative efforts not only with ODF and NRCS but also the Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative group have ensured that treatments proposed in the East Face project area have been closely coordinated with the fuel reduction and vegetation management activities occurring or planned to occur on adjacent private and state lands. This effort has truly made this project an integral part of the “all hands, all lands” CWS principle,” said Montoya.

A range of five alternatives was developed last winter to meet the purpose and need of this project and respond to the key issues raised during scoping. Alternatives range from no action to the creation of an extensive network of strategic fuel reduction areas focusing on key ridges, road systems, private land boundaries, wildland urban interface areas, and developed recreation areas. Analysis of the effects of

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implementing each of these alternatives has been completed and documented in the East Face Vegetation Management Project EA which is now available for a 30-day public comment period.

This East Face project is subject to the pre-decisional objection process at 36 CFR 218. Only individuals or organizations that submitted specific written comments during a designated opportunity for public participation (scoping or this 30-day public comment period) may object (36 CFR 218.5). The complete EA, maps, data tables, and comment requirements are available online at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=41765> .

East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains Partnership

Many adjacent private landowners have received funding for fuel reduction work from a joint federal initiative called the East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains Partnership. The primary goal of the East Face initiative is to meet the goals of the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy by reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire through forest fuels reduction, restoring and maintaining landscapes, and improving fire response.

The partnership combines the collective skills and expertise of the NRCS, the U.S. Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Bureau of Land Management. These agencies are working together to proactively address wildfire issues in the East Face with an “all hands all lands” approach—spanning both public and private lands.

Together these partners identified 47,000 acres for the East Face Vegetation Management Project on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and BLM lands to target fuel reduction and forest stand improvements. The long term goal is to create areas of reduced fuel loadings across public and private lands to protect private residences and public infrastructure from the threat of wildfire, while also improving overall forest health.

The East Face effort will also reduce the threat of loss to wildfire to the watersheds that contribute to the irrigation needs of local farmers and create areas of reduced fuel loadings adjacent the municipal water supplies for La Grande and Baker City; and protect key habitat for federally-threatened bull trout, steelhead and Chinook salmon.

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NRCS provides funding and technical assistance for eligible landowners to perform conservation practices on private lands. For the East Face project in 2014, NRCS funded \$1.4 million for 33 contracts with private landowners in Baker and Union counties, spanning 3,076 acres.

As the lead for the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy pilot project for the Northern Blue Mountain Area (which the East Face area lies within), ODF provides technical assistance to private landowners for similar fuels reduction activities. To sign up or for more information about funding eligibility, contact the USDA Service Center in La Grande: (541) 963-4178 or Baker City: (541) 523-7121 or visit the NRCS Oregon website at: www.or.nrcs.usda.gov.

More information is available at the East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains project website: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/EastFace and the East Face Vegetation Management Project Environmental Analysis website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=41765>

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